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AUTHOR Meyers, Dave; Blom, Kaaren
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ABSTRACT

The implementation of training packages (TPs) in Australian workplaces was examined through case studies of the use of TPs in nontraditional trade areas by six innovative registered training organizations (RTOs) across Australia. The study focused on the extent to which new and flexible approaches to learning, training delivery, and assessment have been used in implementation of TPs. The study RTOs delivered training and assessment in a broad range of TPs, including TPs from the following occupational areas: entertainment; community services; outdoor recreation; and horticulture. The six RTOs included an enterprise-based RTO, a community-based RTO, and four public RTOs (including one technical and further education institute and two institutes of technology). All six RTOs used innovative and flexible approaches to delivery and assessment of TPs. Learners' needs were the central focus for framing processes. Previous experience with competency-based training and assessment was said to facilitate uptake of TPs. Most providers used multiple pathways to qualifications, including a mix of on-the-job and off-the-job training and assessment strategies. Recognition of current competency and recognition of prior learning were being used extensively. Collaboration and close liaison with industry was allowing providers to access valuable enterprise resources for training. Many nontraditional-type trainers and learners were involved with TPs. (MN)

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Training Package implementation: innovative and flexible approaches

Dave Meyers and Kaaren Blom

CURVE (Centre Undertaking Research in Vocational Education), Canberra Institute of Technology, Australian Capital Territory

Note: This project is a work in progress and the following comments and observations should be regarded as initial thoughts only. The findings will be more fully developed during the process of writing the project report.

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This paper reports on the preliminary findings from a National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC) funded study on the implementation of Training Packages (TPs). The purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which new and flexible approaches to learning, training delivery and assessment have been used in the implementation of TPs.

The paper will discuss the models of implementation being adopted, potential barriers, stakeholder acceptance of new strategies and successful strategies and interventions.

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Definitions

The **flexibility** in TPs is expressed in:

- the range of qualifications and the flexibility within package rules for the qualification;
- the flexibility and generic nature of Range of Variable and Evidence Guide statements within units of competency; and
- the limited detail and generic nature of the guidelines for delivery and assessment.

Flexibility in

> ...Training Package implementation requires teacher/trainers to identify and document which qualifications they intend to offer, what learning strategies, teaching programs and assessment approaches they will use, what resources will be needed for delivery and assessment and how/where these will be obtained. (Senate Committee 2000)

> An **innovation** is an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by the individual or other unit of adoption. It matters little whether the idea is "objectively" new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation. (Rogers 1983)

The following are seen as important operational elements of **innovation.**

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Customer focus - All innovation should be focused on creating value for the customer. Understanding of their needs is one of the best stimulators of new possibilities.
Creativity - Everything starts from an idea and the best way to get a great idea is to generate a lot of possibilities.
Communication - Open communication of information, ideas and feelings is the lifeblood of innovation.
Collaboration - Innovation is a group process. It feeds on interaction, information and the power of teams.
(Innovative Network, www.thinksmart.com)

Background to the project

The project was initially intended to document examples of 'best practice' in TP implementation; however, it became evident after initial research that many TPs were still in the early stages of implementation and that insufficient time had elapsed since the introduction of TPs for best practice models to have fully developed. It was therefore decided that it would be more useful for the project to focus on documentation of innovative and flexible approaches to delivery and assessment of TPs.

Scope of the project

The researchers were aware at the time of drafting of the project proposal that the Department of Training and Employment in Western Australia was already conducting a study on behalf of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) which was focused on traditional trade areas entitled 'Alternate pathways to AQF Certificate III Qualifications in Trade Occupations'. Therefore, they proposed a complementary study to research ways in which TPs were being implemented in non-traditional trade areas in other states.

The project proposed single case studies of innovative RTOs located in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia, and two case studies in Queensland.

Categories of RTO selected for the case studies include an enterprise-based RTO, a community-based RTO, institutional public RTOs and a smaller scale public RTO. The focus for these RTOs is variable. Some focus on assessment-only operations, which is mostly assessment-only but has some training provision, while the public RTOs engage in delivery and assessment activities. Also, some RTOs focus on delivery and assessment of competencies within a single TP, while others deliver training and assessment in over 30 different TPs.

Given the diverse nature of the RTOs included, it follows that there are quite different constraints and considerations involved according to the individual charter of the RTOs.

For instance, assessment-only RTOs which assess under a single TP need much less infrastructure and have simpler administrative structures than those required by institutional RTOs. As a consequence, their capacity for innovation and flexibility

may be enhanced but at the expense of having the capacity to provide comprehensive training across a diverse range of TPs.

Candidate selection

Information regarding potential candidates for case studies was gained by consultation with approximately 20 state and national ITABS, and informally through technical and further education (TAFE) networks. This consultation process with ITABs yielded approximately 20 potential case studies that were then ranked according to the following selection criteria. A final group of six candidates was then selected.

Selection criteria for case studies	
Employ a flexible approach to learning, delivery and assessment	Endorsement by ITAB/STA
Employ non-traditional areas of delivery/assessment	Broad range of TPs
Include an example of an Institute-wide approach	VET in Schools component
Include an example of collaboration	Regional /remote area servicing
Must be sufficiently established to allow adequate documentation	Include a full on-job delivery/assessment model

Profile of the six case studies

Sydney Opera House (SOH)(New South Wales)

This is an enterprise-based Registered Training Organisation (RTO) which provides qualifications in the Entertainment Training Package (ETP) mainly, but also provides other training, including Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. In their role as mainly an assessment-only RTO, they have a collaborative approach to working with members of the entertainment industry. They focus on servicing training needs in areas where workers have high levels of technical skill, but low levels of formal qualifications due to the absence of a formal qualifications framework for this industry sector in the past.

The initial focus has been on full on-job Recognition of Current Competency (RCC). SOH use a holistic approach to the assessment of competency, whereby a range of competencies are assessed in discussion format, rather than using a checklist approach to assess individual competencies.

A flexible approach to qualifications is also used. The ETP allows learners to specialise in areas such as lighting and sound. Although a worker may be employed as a lighting technician, many smaller organisations do not engage in the full range of activities or do not have the full range of equipment to enable workers to gain competence in all the competencies listed in the Certificate IV in Entertainment (Lighting). SOH overcomes this problem by allowing workers to complete the competencies they can from the Lighting specialisation and then to select elements from other ETP streams to make up enough points to complete a Certificate IV in Entertainment (General).

SOH has worked with the Civic Theatre Newcastle using the RCC process to give workers qualifications in the ETP and has also provided integrated training and assessment to qualify them as Workplace Assessors. These people are now using their qualifications to facilitate a VET in Schools program in the Hunter region.

Colac Adult Training Support Service (Victoria)

This is a community-based RTO which delivers a range of training including the Disability Worker Stream within the Community Services TP. It is a recent winner of the Victorian Community Services and Health (State ITB) award for having an established learning culture.

This is an assessment-only RTO mainly, with an emphasis on RCC for existing workers. They also do some training delivery and assessment. They use an innovative and flexible approach to assessment. Action learning is used in the workplace to support the development of competence. Work tasks are programmed to allow staff to gain experience which is later used as part of their evidence of competency. For example, programming and chairing of staff meetings is rotated to allow a range of staff to gain experience. Professional development activities are also mapped to Training Package competencies to provide staff with experience which can then be used in the RCC process. For instance, staff are encouraged to take on a facilitation and delivery role for sessions at their regional conference. This experience is later used as evidence of competence.

The Outlook (Queensland)

This is a public RTO which now delivers the Outdoor Recreation TP. The Outlook engages in both training and assessment. They have a long history of non-accredited training delivery in the outdoor recreation area prior to the advent of TPs. Once the decision was taken to deliver training using the Outdoor Recreation TP, The Outlook used an innovative approach to form a team of people with the appropriate qualifications for delivery and assessment under the TP. The existing staff had extensive experience working in the area and believed that they could demonstrate that they were competent in most of the competencies listed in the TP, so an external industry panel was then formed. This panel conducted assessments of staff members against the competencies in the Training Package and guided the staff through the process to eventual completion of the Certificate IV in Outdoor Recreation. Staff from The Outlook have also completed Workplace Trainer and Assessor qualifications.

Once The Outlook had completed credentialing its own staff in the competencies in the Outdoor Recreation TP, its members shifted their focus to external organisations. This RTO now provides training and assessment in outdoor recreation for a broad range of community service agencies. About 120 staff from community agencies have completed training with The Outlook. About 70 of these trained staff have subsequently been registered to bring service agency clients to the Outlook site and to use the facilities as part of their early intervention services strategy. The intention is to work with the clients at a personal development level using the experiential learning model rather than on the completion of whole qualifications, although clients may in the process complete some, or even all of the competencies in the Outdoor Recreation Training Package, if appropriate to their needs.

After some experience, it has become evident that to effectively service the needs of their clients, the service agency workers need a broader range of competencies than those available in the Outdoor Recreation Training package. The Outlook has responded flexibly to this need by developing an innovative Certificate IV in Program Development and Facilitation which comprises competencies from the Community Services TP as well as from the Outdoor Recreation TP. It is proposed that community service agency workers will select appropriate competencies, and after participation in residentials and completion of workplace projects, will be assessed for competence. It is expected that this qualification will better equip community service agency workers with the mix of skills required to work effectively with their particular client group.

Southern Queensland Institute of Technology (SQIT) – Toowoomba College (Queensland)

This is a public RTO which delivers training and assessment in a broad range of TPs. The delivery of the Horticulture TP has been selected to showcase flexible and innovative delivery strategies that can be used to service the training needs of learners in remote communities. SQIT provides training to about one third of the area of Queensland, with learners being located quite remote from Toowoomba. For instance, some learners are located 900 km west of Brisbane.

Opportunities for direct face-to-face training in this situation are obviously limited, so a distance education model was adopted which involves traditional elements such as mail outs of reading materials complemented with effective use of information technology. Video conferencing and web-based video streaming are central features of this strategy.

Formal contact between learners and staff from SQIT occurs at least six times each year. Contact includes twice-yearly student attendance at workshops in Toowoomba and on-site visits by SQIT staff to learners in remote areas, supplemented by phone, fax and email contact. This 'pastoral care' strategy is considered essential to improving ultimate completion rates for remote area learners.

The workshops in Toowoomba are flexibly structured according to the requirements of the learners. There is no set structure or format; rather, each workshop is structured to cover the competencies required by the learner group attending.

Regency Institute of TAFE – Regency Annexe (South Australia)

This is a public RTO which delivers training and assessment in a broad range of TPs. The focus for this case study is on the delivery of the Children's Services stream of the Community Services TP and the use of Learning Centres as an innovative way to deliver the training.

Regency Institute uses multiple pathways for learners to complete qualifications in a flexible fashion and according to their particular needs. They have an established history of servicing the training needs of clients in northern Adelaide as well as remote area training, including Aboriginal and other communities, in the northern part of the state using a traditional distance education model. They also train people in workplaces and make extensive use of the RCC process for these experienced workers.

They have in the past used traditional work placement for campus-based learners who do not have a workplace. This involved students completing theoretical components of their course on campus then doing a block placement in a child care centre. Regency staff would visit these students for about one hour per week and complete a holistic on-job assessment of each student's performance.

It was decided, as part of the implementation strategy for TPs, that the placement system was inadequate. It was considered that there was less of a theoretical component underpinning competencies in the TP and that every competency had a practical component which had to be addressed individually. Students therefore needed to spend more time in the workplace, and more time was required for assessment. Staff from the Regency Institute wanted to ensure that the approach they adopted for the implementation of the Training Package had the approval of industry. It was therefore decided to hold workshops with industry representatives with the aim of jointly developing the implementation strategy. These workshops resulted in the Learning Centre concept. The distinguishing feature of Learning Centres is the placement of six students per centre with two students assigned to the care of infants, two students assigned to care for toddlers and two students to care for babies. The students work in the centres two days per week for a semester. A Regency Institute facilitator attends the Learning Centre for six hours per week and provides training and assessment for the students.

This system is seen as having several advantages over the old system, where students and facilitators spent less time in child care centres and more time on campus at Regency Institute. Employers have commented that it is better for parents and children for the students to be on site more often, as they become familiar faces in the centres. Also, the links and communication channels between TAFE facilitators and centre staff are strengthened by the increased time that TAFE facilitators are spending out in the centres.

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) (Australian Capital Territory)

This is a public RTO which delivers training and assessment in a broad range of TPs. CIT has set up a comprehensive institute-wide implementation strategy.

This has included the following elements:

- A program of professional development for teachers using TPs, involving information dissemination seminars and formal action learning groups which worked to solve implementation issues within faculties and then disseminated their findings across the whole institute.

- Involvement in public forums for industry and public/private training providers.

- Participation in a virtual forum which provided the opportunity for a broad range of stakeholders including industry representatives, training providers, ITAB members and STA representatives to discuss a range of issues online.

- Extensive curriculum development to ensure that TP competencies became the central focus for all training activities, while allowing value-adding by identification of a strong framework in which delivery of underpinning skills and knowledge could occur.

- Major modification of existing student information management and record keeping systems to accommodate direct recording of competencies from TPs as well as recording modular outcomes.

- Fostering of collaborative arrangements with an emphasis on moving training on-job where appropriate.

- Creation of a TPs hotlink on the CIT website, which linked to information about TPs and provided a virtual workspace in which major aspects of the professional development project were conducted.

Recurrent themes

- All the organisations documented in the case studies have used innovative and flexible approaches to delivery and assessment of TPs.

- The needs of learners have been the central focus for the framing of processes.

- Providers who have had previous experience with competency-based training and assessment have commented that this has assisted them with the uptake of TPs.

- Most providers were using multiple pathways to qualifications and including a mix of on-job and off-job training and assessment strategies.

- Extensive use has been made of RCC for existing workers and recognition of prior learning (RPL) where learners have done previous relevant studies in the subject area.

- A mix of traditional and flexible delivery strategies have been used.

- Collaboration and close liaison with industry has allowed providers to access valuable enterprise resources for training.

- There are many non-traditional type trainers, as well as learners, involved with TPs, some of whom were not participating in older-style training models.

Emerging questions

The researchers have observed a broad range of approaches to assessment of competence and gained the impression that it is possible that quite different standards for assessment are possibly being applied by assessors, depending on the sort of RTO they represent and the client group with which they are working.

How consistent is the level of assessment expertise across RTOs and are assessments conducted with equivalent rigour across all sectors and client groups in the VET system?
The type of evidence required for demonstration of competence and the process for evidence gathering also appears to be quite variable.

How consistent is the quality of the evidence gathered by RTOs and is it valid to assess multiple competencies within the one assessment event without providing discrete evidence of competence for each individual competency being assessed?

Some RTOs have initially focused on assessment for RCC of existing workers. They have been able to do this with very little infrastructure for delivery of training and without extensive other training resources. It is possible that the pent-up demand for RCC will eventually dissipate, and assessment-only providers will need to shift their emphasis to delivery of training.

How sustainable are RTOs who have been primarily engaged in RCC and who lack resources for delivery of training?

Some of the providers interviewed raised the question of how to ensure consistency in interpretation of standards across different providers and different geographical regions, and suggested that there is a need for moderation processes to occur.

How and when should a moderation process be implemented to check for consistency in assessment under TPs?

Initial observations

It appears to be critically important to have a 'driver' who takes ultimate responsibility for the oversight of implementation of TPs either at the level of single TP implementation or at an institution-wide level.

These 'drivers' need systemic and management support if the success of the implementation is to be sustained.

Other initial observations:

- The use of a team approach increases the likelihood of successful implementation.
- Many of the people interviewed were dynamic individuals who were engaging in innovative and flexible training strategies prior to the introduction of TPs, and while TPs have for some provided a useful vehicle to further develop these strategies, they can be given only some of the credit for the outcomes.
- Benefits are commonly observed to flow on to a broader range of people than simply those receiving the initial training; other stakeholders are affected by these concentric circles of benefit.

- Positive outcomes cannot be sustained in the absence of ongoing funding. Professional development, infrastructure upgrades and development of training and assessment resources all require financial support.

Contacts

Canberra Institute of Technology
http://www.cit.act.edu.au

Southern Queensland Institute of Technology (SQIT)
http://www.sqit.tafe.net/

Regency Institute of TAFE
http://www.regency.tafe.sa.edu.au/front.html

The Outlook - see Recreational Training Queensland (ITAB)
http://www.rtq.com.au/home.htm

Sydney Opera House
http://www.soh.nsw.gov.au/

Colac Adult Training Support Service (part of ACE)
http://www.colacace.com.au/

Innovative Network
www.thinksmart.com

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Contact details

Dave Meyers and Kaaren Blom
CURVE (Centre Undertaking Research in Vocational Education)
Canberra Institute of Technology
GPO Box 826, Canberra City
Australian Capital Territory 2601
Email: dave.meyers@cit.act.edu.au